Suffering, Honour, And The Culture Of The West

A theme of David Myatt's post-2011 writings – and of his philosophy of pathei-mathos {1} – is the question of human-caused suffering leading him to ask whether we humans have changed significantly, en masse, such that such suffering is less now than in the past three to four thousand years. Which question led him to write

> "if we do not or cannot learn from our human culture of pathei-mathos, from the many thousands of years of such suffering as that culture documents and presents and remembers; if we no longer concern ourselves with *de studiis humanitatis ac litterarum*, then do we as a sentient species deserve to survive?" {2}

A century after the mechanized slaughter of the First World War which killed millions of people and injured millions more, and seventy-three years after the slaughter and suffering of millions more people in the Second World War, human-caused suffering continues around the world. War and armed conflict and destruction in the Middle East and Africa and elsewhere. Terrorist attacks in Europe, America, Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, and elsewhere. Meanwhile humans, individually and in small groups, continue to kill, rape, and be brutal and violent and oppressive toward and injure and cause suffering to other human beings in hundreds of thousands of attacks every year all around the world.

As Myatt wrote in respect of the suffering caused by war and armed conflict,

> "it is as if we, as a sentient species, have learnt nothing from the past four thousand years. Nothing from the accumulated pathei-mathos of those who did such deeds or who experienced such deeds or who suffered because of such deeds. Learnt nothing from four thousand years of the human culture that such pathei-mathos created and which to us is manifest – remembered, celebrated, transcribed – in Art, literature, memoirs, music, poetry, myths, legends, and often in the ethos of a numinous ancestral awareness or in those sometimes mystical allegories that formed the basis for a spiritual way of life.
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> All we have done is to either (i) change the names of that which or those whom we are loyal to and for which or for whom we fight, kill, and are prepared to die for, or (ii) given names to such new causes as we have invented in order to give us some identity or some excuse to fight, endure, triumph, preen, or die for.
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> Pharaoh, Caesar, Pope, Defender of the Faith, President, General, Prime Minister; Rome, Motherland, Fatherland, The British Empire, Our Great Nation, North, South, our democratic way of life. It makes little difference; the same loyalty; the same swaggering; the same hubris; the same desire, or the same obligation or coercion, to participate and fight." {3}

While in regard to humans killing, injuring, being violent toward and preying on other humans he asked,

> "Must we therefore be resigned to suffering, to misery, to injustices, to the iniquity, to the continuing iniquity, of selfish, hubriatic, individuals who bully, rape, scheme, subjugate, manipulate, injure, maim, and kill?
>
> Reassured by judicium divinum or – perhaps – hoping, trusting, in the pending justice of some judge, some government, or some State?" {4}

Myatt writes that his

> "fallible answer to the question of how to deal with the suffering that blights this world [is] the answer of a personal honour. That is, for each of us to gently try to carry that necessary harmony, that balance, of δίκη, wordlessly within; to thus restrain ourselves from causing harm while being able, prepared, in the immediacy of the moment, to personally, physically, restrain – prevent – others when we chance upon such harm being done. This, to me, is Life in its wholesome natural fullness – as lived, presenced, by the brief, mortal, consciously aware, emanations we are; mortal emanations capable of restraint, reason, culture, and reforming change; of learning from our pathei-mathos and that of others." {4}

His "fallible answer" may seem to many to be somewhat idealistic given the reality that those (to use a Myattian term) with a bad or rotten physis are not going to suddenly change their personality or are congenitally incapable of learning from 'the culture of pathei-mathos'. But understood in the context of his philosophy the answer is logical given Myatt's analysis of what the actual problem is or might be. An analysis which reveals that his philosophy is far from idealistic and in truth is rather radical, for in respect of the causes of suffering he writes in one memorable essay that

> "It is almost as if we – somehow flawed – need something beyond our personal lives to vivify us; to excite us; to test ourselves; to identify with. As if we cannot escape the barbarian who lies in wait, within; ready to subsume us once again so that we sally forth on behalf of some cause, some leader, or some ideal, or some abstraction, or as part of some crusade. As if we human beings, as Sophocles intimated over two thousand years ago, are indeed, by nature, and have remained sometimes honourable and sometimes dishonourable beings, able to sometimes be rational, thinking, beings, but also unable to escape our desire, our need, our propensity, to not only be barbaric but to try to justify to ourselves and to others our need for, and even our enjoyment of, such barbarity.
>
> Or perhaps the stark truth is that it is we men who are flawed or incomplete and who thus need to change.

> As if we, we men, have not yet evolved enough to be able to temper, to balance, our harsh masculous nature with the muliebral; a balance which would see us become almost a new species; one which has, having finally sloughed off the suffering-causing hubriatic patriarchal attitudes of the past, learnt from the pathei-mathos of our ancestors, from the pathei-mathos of our human culture, born and grown and nurtured as our human culture was, has been, and is by over four thousand years of human-caused suffering. A learning from and of the muliebral, for the wyrdful thread which runs through, which binds, our human pathei-mathos is a muliebral one: the thread of kindness, of gentleness, of love, of compassion; of empathy; of the personal over and above the supra-personal." {5}

In a later essay he is even more forthright, stating that

> "it is men – unbalanced in physis – who have caused and are responsible for wars, invasions, and the deaths and destruction and suffering that results, just as most violent crime and murders are caused by men. And it is they, of course, who have – also for millennia – dominated and manipulated women (or tried to), who have raped women, who have physically abused them, and killed so many of them, and all because some men cannot control themselves lacking as they do the virtue of honour." {6}

In regard to how he arrived at this conclusion he derived it as he derived most of his philosophy from his own pathei-mathos, from his own practical experiences extending over some four decades.

> "As I know from my outré experience of life – especially my forty years of extremism, hubris, and selfishness; my terms of imprisonment, my experience with gangs, with people of bad intentions and with those of good intentions – it really is as if we terran men have, en masse, learnt nothing from the past four or five thousand years." {7}

He is therefore not being idealistic or academic in an 'ivory tower' sort of way or basing his argument on statistics or on theories or ideologies propounded by others. He is instead writing from life having analysed his outré, his exeatic, his diverse experiences using 'the human culture of pathei-mathos' as a guide and it is therefore on that basis that his conclusions should be understood, judged and appreciated.

It is on that basis that in 2012 he wrote that

> "the uncomfortable truth is that we, we men, are and have been the ones causing, needing, participating in, those wars and conflicts. We – not women – are the cause of most of the suffering, death, destruction, hate, violence, brutality, and killing, that has occurred and which is still occurring, thousand year upon thousand year; just as we are the ones who seek to be – or who often need to be – prideful and 'in control'; and the ones who through greed or alleged need or because of some ideation have saught to exploit not only other human beings but the Earth itself. We are also masters of deception; of the lie. Cunning with our excuses, cunning in persuasion, and skilled at inciting hatred and violence. And yet we men have also shown ourselves to be, over thousands of years, valourous; capable of noble, selfless, deeds. Capable of doing what is fair and restraining ourselves from doing what is unethical. Capable of a great and a gentle love.
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> This paradoxy continues to perplex me. And I have no answers as to how we might change, reform, this paradoxical φύσις of ours, and so – perhaps – balance the suffering-causing masculous with the empathic muliebral and yet somehow in some way retain that which is the genesis of the valourous." {7}

It is clear from his later writings that from 2012 on he pondered upon that paradoxy and arrived at a tentative and, in his words, a fallible answer. Which pondering he describes in some detail in his lengthy five part essay, published in 2013, titled Questions of Good, Evil, Honour, and God, and in which essay he gave voice to his doubts about the current solutions to the problem of personally-caused suffering – such as believing in judicium divinum (divine justice) or "trusting in the pending justice of some judge, some government, or some State." In a poignant passage he asked in respect of those personally causing suffering whether it was wrong for him

> "to still feel the need for someone, some many, somewhere, to somehow in some way forestall, prevent, such deeds by such persons as may unjustly harm some others so that there is no waiting for the divine justice of a deity; no waiting for some Court somewhere to – possibly, and sometimes – requite a grievous wrong. No waiting for that promised idealistic idyllic future society when we humans – having somehow (perhaps miraculously) been changed in nature en masse – have ceased to so grievously, harmfully, selfishly, inflict ourselves on others." {4}

He then presented his fallible answer, which was that

> "of a personal honour. That is, for each of us to gently try to carry that necessary harmony, that balance, of δίκη, wordlessly within; to thus restrain ourselves from causing harm while being able, prepared, in the immediacy of the moment, to personally, physically, restrain – prevent – others when we chance upon such harm being done." {4}

Myatt thus championed not only personal self-defence and "valorous defence of another in a personal situation" but also "if our personal judgement of the circumstances deem it necessary, lethal force." {8}

In respect of the question of suffering he therefore advocated something both quite practical, and quite radical at least the lands of the developed nations of the West.

The Practicalities of Personal Honour

As befits his decades of personal experience of the practicalities of life – thirty years as a violent political activist and propagandist, ten years as a Muslim activist, several years leading a criminal gang, among other experiences – Myatt was aware of how the governments of the nations of the West disapproved of individuals using their own judgement in regard to employing lethal force with many outlawing the carrying of such weapons as would enable effective self-defence and the "valorous defence of another in a personal situation."

In reply to a question asked of him in 2015 he wrote

> "how – or even can – societies in the West and around the world promote the virtue of empathy and personal honour, and if they could, would they want to given how most such societies (especially those in the West) are based on law and justice being the prerogative of the State? In respect of empathy at least, there is – as I suggested – the solution of Studia Humanitatis; that is, the solution of educating citizens in what I have termed the culture of pathei- mathos.
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> But since personal honour means that individuals should have the right to bear and carry weapons, and be lawfully able – in the immediacy of the personal moment – to use such weapons in self-defence and in valorous defence of others dishonourably attacked, it is most unlikely the governments or politicians of modern Western societies would even consider such an honourable solution to the problem of suffering.
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> Indeed, they seem to be moving toward even more restrictions on individuals bearing and carrying weapons; moving toward severely punishing those who use weapons in self-defence or even in valorous defence of others dishonourably attacked.
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> That is, that there is in many Western societies a desire, by governments and politicians, for more control over their citizens, for more interventions, at home and abroad, in the name of 'security', and for the use of force to be lawfully restricted to those – such as the Police or the armed forces – who are appointed and who serve on the basis of a chain of command which stops with some government representative or some politician or some military leader responsible to one of the foregoing.
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> Thus, while I personally strive to uphold what honour demands in the immediacy of the moment, most people – even if they agreed with the principle – would be wary of doing so, given current laws in a country such as Britain. Or, more probably, they would consider it an unnecessary and possibly a retrograde thing to do." {9}

Although in the same reply he admits that his "own preoccupation in respect of personal honour may be somewhat misplaced" it is clear that regardless of such and other diplomatic language he personally supports the right of individuals to carry weapons for use in self-defence and in defence of others dishonourably attacked even though many Western governments have, fairly recently (in the last one hundred years), deemed the carrying of such weapons to be illegal despite the fact that the carrying of such weapons for such purposes was for thousands of years an acceptable cultural and ancestral custom among the peoples of the West.

Which perhaps – and yet again – places Myatt on the side of our ancestral Western culture. An ancestral culture whose metaphysics and ethos he has not only described in recent (2017) works of his such as Classical Paganism And The Christian Ethos and Tu Es Diaboli Ianua but also and importantly evolved, beyond mythoi and thus beyond named gods and goddesses.

A Western culture exemplified, according to Myatt, by καλὸς κἀγαθός. That is, by those who "conduct themselves in a gentlemanly or lady-like manner and who thus manifest – because of their innate physis or through pathei-mathos or through a certain type of education or learning – nobility of character," {10} and which nobility of character is manifest in "the virtues of personal honour and manners" {10} and which Western culture was also – according to Myatt and contra modern 'political correctness' – manifest in a natural and necessary aristocracy composed of those who possess nobility of character and who thus exemplify καλὸς κἀγαθός.

Rachael Stirling
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{1} The book T*he Mystical Philosophy of David* Myatt by Wright & Parker is an informative guide to Myatt's philosophy.

The book is available as a gratis open access pdf document here: https://davidmyatt.files.wordpress.com/2021/09/myatt-philosophy-third-edition.pdf

{2} Education And The Culture Of Pathei-Mathos. 2014.

{3} A Slowful Learning, Perhaps. 2012.

{4} Questions of Good, Evil, Honour, and God, Part Five. 2013.

{5} A Slowful Learning, Perhaps. 2012.

{6} Questions For DWM. 2015.

{7} Blue Reflected Starlight. 2012.

{8} qv. the Appendix: The Numinous Balance of Honour.

{9} Questions For DWM, 2015.

{10} Tu Es Diaboli Ianua. 2017

Appendix

The Numinous Balance of Honour

In many ways, the personal virtue of honour, and the cultivation of wu-wei, [1] are - together - a practical, a living, manifestation of our understanding and appreciation of the numinous; of how to live, to behave, as empathy intimates we can or should in order to avoid committing the folly, the error, of ὕβρις, in order not to cause suffering, and in order to re-present, to acquire, ἁρμονίη.

For personal honour is essentially a presencing, a grounding, of ψυχή - of Life, of our φύσις - occurring when the insight (the knowing) of a developed empathy inclines us toward a compassion that is, of necessity, balanced by σωφρονεῖν and in accord with δίκη.

This balancing of compassion - of the need not to cause suffering - by σωφρονεῖν and δίκη is perhaps most obvious on that particular occasion when it may be judged necessary to cause suffering to another human being. That is, in honourable self-defence. For it is natural - part of our reasoned, fair, just, human nature - to defend ourselves when attacked and (in the immediacy of the personal moment) to valorously, with chivalry, act in defence of someone close-by who is unfairly attacked or dishonourably threatened or is being bullied by others, and to thus employ, if our personal judgement of the circumstances deem it necessary, lethal force.

This use of force is, importantly, crucially, restricted - by the individual nature of our judgement, and by the individual nature of our authority - to such personal situations of immediate self-defence and of valorous defence of others, and cannot be extended beyond that, for to so extend it, or attempt to extend it beyond the immediacy of the personal moment of an existing physical threat, is an arrogant presumption - an act of ὕβρις - which negates the fair, the human, presumption of innocence [1] of those we do not personally know, we have no empathic knowledge of, and who present no direct, immediate, personal, threat to us or to others nearby us.

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Such personal self-defence and such valorous defence of another in a personal situation are in effect a means to restore the natural balance which the unfair, the dishonourable, behaviour of others upsets. That is, such defence fairly, justly, and naturally in the immediacy of the moment corrects their error of ὕβρις resulting from their bad (their rotten) φύσις; a rotten character evident in their lack of the virtue, the skill, of σωφρονεῖν. For had they possessed that virtue, and if their character was not bad, they would not have undertaken such a dishonourable attack.

David Myatt
2013

[1] qv. *A Note On Some Terms*.

A Note On Some Terms

ἁρμονίη

ἁρμονίη (harmony) is or can be manifest/discovered by an individual cultivating wu-wei and σωφρονεῖν (a fair and balanced personal, individual, judgement).

δίκη

Depending on context, δίκη could be the judgement of an individual (or Judgement personified), or the natural and the necessary balance, or the correct/customary/ancestral way, or what is expected due to custom, or what is considered correct and natural, and so on.

A personified Judgement is the goddess of the natural balance, evident in the ancestral customs, the ways, the way of life, the ethos, of a community, whose judgement, δίκη, is "in accord with", has the nature or the character of, what tends to restore such balance after some deed or deeds by an individual or individuals have upset or disrupted that balance. This sense of δίκη as one'sancestral customs is evident, for example, in Homer (Odyssey, III, 244).

In the philosophy of pathei-mathos, the term Δίκα - spelt thus in a modern way with a capital Δ - is sometimes used to intimate a new, a particular and numinous, philosophical principle, and differentiate Δίκα from the more general δίκη. As a numinous principle, or axiom, Δίκα thus suggests what lies beyond and what was the genesis of δίκη personified as the goddess, Judgement – the goddess of natural balance, of the ancestral way and ancestral customs.

Innocence

Innocence is regarded as an attribute of those who, being personally unknown to us, are therefore unjudged us by and who thus are given the benefit of the doubt. For this presumption of innocence of others – until direct personal experience, and individual and empathic knowing of them, prove otherwise – is the fair, the reasoned, the numinous, the human, thing to do. Empathy and πάθει μάθος incline us toward treating other human beings as we ourselves would wish to be treated; that is they incline us toward fairness, toward self-restraint, toward being well-mannered, and toward an appreciation and understanding of innocence.

σωφρονεῖν

I use σωφρονεῖν (sophronein) in preference to σωφροσύνη (sophrosyne) since sophrosyne has acquired an English interpretation – "soundness of mind, moderation" – which in my view distorts the meaning of the original Greek. As with my use of the term πάθει μάθος (pathei-mathos) I use σωφρονεῖν in an Anglicized manner with there thus being no necessity to employ inflective forms.

wu-wei

Wu-wei is a Taoist term used in The Way of Pathei-Mathos to refer to a personal 'letting-be' deriving from a feeling, a knowing, that an essential part of wisdom is cultivation of an interior personal balance and which cultivation requires acceptance that one must work with, or employ, things according to their nature, their φύσις, for to do otherwise is incorrect, and inclines us toward, or is, being excessive – that is, toward the error, the unbalance, that is hubris, an error often manifest in personal arrogance, excessive personal pride, and insolence - that is, a disrespect for the numinous.

In practice, the knowledge, the understanding, the intuition, the insight that is wu-wei is a knowledge, an understanding, that can be acquired from empathy, πάθει μάθος, and by a knowing of and an appreciation of the numinous. This knowledge and understanding is of wholeness, and that life, things/beings, change, flow, exist, in certain natural ways which we human beings cannot change however hard we might try; that such a hardness of human trying, a belief in such hardness, is unwise, un-natural, upsets the natural balance and can cause misfortune/suffering for us and/or for others, now or in the future. Thus success lies in discovering the inner nature (the physis) of things/beings/ourselves and gently, naturally, slowly, working with this inner nature, not striving against it.